



U.S. Immigration  
and Customs  
Enforcement

March 10, 2006

# Fact Sheet

## *Operation Community Shield*

### **Overview:**

U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) first launched Operation Community Shield in February 2005 after a national threat assessment by all ICE field offices identified the gang known as Mara Salvatrucha or MS-13 as one of the largest and most violent street gangs in the country.

The ICE threat assessment found that most of the MS-13 gang members were foreign-born; in the United States illegally; had prior criminal convictions, and/or were involved in crimes that made them subject to ICE's broad immigration and customs authorities.

To address this threat, ICE crafted Operation Community Shield as a national law enforcement initiative that brings to bear all of ICE's immigration and customs law enforcement powers in the fight against violent street gangs. Under the auspices of this initiative, ICE works to:

- Identify violent gangs and develop intelligence on their membership, associates and organizations.
- Deter, disrupt and dismantle gang operations by tracing and seizing their cash, weapons and other assets.
- Criminally prosecute or remove gang members from the United States.
- Partner with other law enforcement agencies at the local, state and federal level – both in the United States and abroad – to develop a “force multiplier” effect in investigations and other law enforcement actions against gangs.
- Conduct outreach efforts to boost public awareness about the fight against violent gangs.

### **Targeting MS-13 and Other Gangs:**

ICE kicked off Operation Community Shield with an enforcement operation that resulted in the arrest of more than 100 members of MS-13. In the months that followed, ICE agents nationwide joined ranks and continued targeting MS-13 members in their jurisdictions. In this first phase of Operation Community Shield, ICE arrested 359 MS-13 members and associates, including 10 clique leaders.

In May 2005, ICE expanded Operation Community Shield to include all criminal street gangs and prison gangs. Among those gangs that came under scrutiny were MS-13, Sureños, 18<sup>th</sup> Street gang, Latin Kings, Vatos Locos, Mexican Mafia, Bloods, Crips, Spanish Gangster Disciples, La Raza gang, Border Brothers, Brown Pride, Norteno, Florencia 13, Tiny Rascal, Asian Boyz, and Jamaican Posse.

In late July 2005, a major enforcement action by ICE and its law enforcement partners resulted in the arrest of 582 different gang members and gang associates, many with criminal records, in cities across

the country. In December 2005, agents from ICE and the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF) teamed up to arrest nearly 70 additional violent gang members in seven states.

### **Recent Enforcement Action:**

Building on the success of these operations, ICE launched another coordinated national enforcement action with its law enforcement partners starting February 24, 2006 and continuing through March 9, 2006. This enforcement action resulted in the arrest of 375 gang members and associates.

Of those arrested in this operation, more than 260 had previous criminal or violent criminal histories. Roughly 73 were arrested on new criminal charges that ranged from drug and firearms violations to charges of re-entering the country after deportation.

### **First Year Results of Community Shield:**

The cumulative results of Operation Community Shield over the past year are far reaching. Since February 2005, ICE agents across 76 field offices, working in conjunction with hundreds of federal, state and local law enforcement agencies nationwide, have arrested a total of 2,388 street gang members and associates, representing 239 different gangs.

To date, these apprehensions include 533 criminal arrests and 1,855 administrative immigration arrests. Fifty-one of those arrested were gang leaders. More than 1,075 of the arrested suspects had violent criminal histories. Through this initiative, ICE has also seized roughly 117 firearms.

Thus far, roughly 153 gang members have been sentenced as a result of criminal prosecutions under Operation Community Shield. They have received sentences as long as 12.5 years for re-entry after deportation, and other lengthy sentences for narcotics charges and firearms violations. The remaining criminal cases are pending.

### **Intelligence Gathering and Sharing:**

Under Operation Community Shield, ICE has received thousands of names of known and suspected gang members from federal, state and local law enforcement agencies, as well as from foreign governments. This information is routinely compared with ICE's immigration and customs databases to identify and prioritize gang suspects who may be subject to ICE's legal jurisdiction.

ICE's Law Enforcement Support Center (LESC) in Vermont plays a central role in this effort by running data on gang suspects provided by other law enforcement agencies against its immigration databases to determine whether these individuals are subject to ICE's federal immigration authorities. This data is then shared with ICE field offices and law enforcement partners to compile target lists.

### **Future of Community Shield:**

During the coming months, ICE anticipates that long-term ICE criminal investigations into gang cliques around the country will ripen to the point of arrest. Already, ICE has worked with its law enforcement counterparts to bring criminal charges against gangs in cities throughout the country.

In June 2005, for example, 14 members and associates of MS-13 were arrested and indicted in Elizabeth, NJ, on charges of conspiracy to distribute cocaine and crack cocaine, conspiracy to transfer false identification documents, and immigration violations as a result of a long-term ICE investigation. In August 2005, ICE worked with federal prosecutors, the FBI, and other law enforcement agencies in Atlanta to bring criminal charges against 18 members of Sureno 13, or SUR-13 for racketeering crimes that included murder, attempted murder, carjacking, armed robbery, and drug dealing.

# ICE #

*U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement was established in March 2003 as the largest investigative arm of the Department of Homeland Security. ICE is comprised of four integrated divisions that form a 21st century law enforcement agency with broad responsibilities for a number of key homeland security priorities.*